

Beverly Steele

Hog Creek Review

Arluckle Award

## Simulation/Illusion

### Simulation

The only time I had sex with another woman was on an Xbox. I remember pushing the buttons firmly and glancing at Jackie out of the corner of my eye. Her straw colored hair was pulled out of her face, bringing out her round, rosy cheeks and bright green eyes. We were at Jackie's house, and I remember how neatly kept her room was despite how messy her locker was in high school. I tried to focus on my Sim—forcing my character to have sex with one of the male guests, "It won't let me 'woohoo' with them," I said disappointedly, "I don't have enough friendship points with them,"

"Ha," Jackie said as she made her Sim character cook an entire turkey in less than 30 seconds, "You can't complete your 'Woohoo with Three Sims' mission," I looked at Jackie's face as she watched her Sim devour a plate of burnt turkey; the lines next to her eyes crinkled as she laughed while her Sim's body rejected the meal by heaving it into a toilet.

"Y'know, our Sims are good friends," I glanced at her through my bangs.

"Yea but we're both girls," Jackie said unconcerned, still watching and making sure her Sim was occupied.

"Yea but... we're *good* friends," One side of my mouth turned up in an awkward smile. I wanted her to feel comfortable even though my stomach was churning and bubbling as if it were trying to speak for me. I felt the air change as soon as she realized what I was hinting at; what had seemed so natural now felt slightly painful. Jackie's gorgeous deep brown eyes sliced through me, keeping my fantasies against a wall like a captive ready for execution. I was straining for breath, desperate to be saved from sure death: "It doesn't mean anything," I laughed, "It's just a game," her dagger-like dare softened slightly.

"It doesn't mean anything?" she questioned, her eyes roving my own body and looking skeptical. She seemed to be teasing me but I didn't quite get it at the time.

"It's just a game," I repeated.

Jackie mouthed, "OK" and actually looked a little excited. My heart started beating out of my chest and Jackie watched in anticipation; I could feel her eyes following our

simulated selves on screen. My fingers started shaking as my Sim nonchalantly lay on the double bed; Jackie's Sim made her way over and I nervously clicked the social function that would fulfill my mission. I bit my lip as they jumped under the covers; the bed started shaking and I could only see the covers going up and down, up and down. The deed was done. I felt an immense sense of satisfaction when our Sims heads appeared above the covers. Jackie's eyes quickly shot to me to check my reaction.

"I knew it wasn't just a game to you," she whispered roughly. Her eyes brightened; if I had paid more attention, I probably could have seen the sun rise and set in her eyes in the following moments. Jackie practically phased over to my couch, only inches from my body. I watched our Sims as they continued to lie next to each other, talking about their dreams for the future I imagined. Clearly aroused by our simulated adventure, Jackie reached out and ran the tips of her fingers across my inner thigh. I surprised myself and shrank away when she reached out to me; I remember wanting to phase into the television screen in the same second her fingers grazed my skin. It felt like she had thrust me against a wall—she was ready for me but it wasn't right. If her tangled gaze was the juror then I would have been found guilty on all counts. The execution of my fantasies had felt less complicated in the manufactured house where things were simple. I watched our Sims get up from the bed and chat casually, and suddenly I couldn't feel her hand travelling around my thigh.

"Maybe we'll just keep playing the game."

### **Illusion**

The first time I followed my girlfriend, I did not know her name yet. I was sitting at my usual corner table in the gloomy little café I frequented when I found her. I distinctly remember that I was enraptured the moment that her iridescent hair reflected my own image. I held my small cup of black coffee and I grinned, feeling my interest was piqued. The café was exceptionally dark that evening so her golden hair caught what little light existed and refracted it back in any which direction it desired. I felt an immense sense of gratification when her straight strands bounced off the light straight into my eyes; it felt like a powerful shock of emotion from her to me. She did not look at me during her stay—I made sure to be very quiet about my ambitions. She sat alone, but her eyes hinted at loneliness—she wanted company. I imagined penetrating her space, sitting close to her, and getting the chance to breathe the same air. Even though I was a stranger to her, I imagined her eyes brightening the moment she saw me, sensing the thread connecting us. I couldn't get a good look at the color of her eyes, but I felt like they were as green as mine were.

With each moment that passed, I felt our connection as it expanded beyond the capacity of the room; our small thread expanded until it became almost impossible to ignore. My grin faded slightly when she broke my elaborate illusion by standing up abruptly. She

moved like a ghost, hardly touching anyone around her. Instinctively, I rose as well, drawn to compulsion by the hardly visible, but concrete cord tying me to her. As she hastened out of the café, I couldn't help but feeling like one of those small children that have to be leashed to their mothers. She tugged me along through the outskirts of New York; I kept my distance, but I found it difficult at times not to wrap myself around her as one does when you feel familiar.

There were moments that I had to coach myself into keeping at least five paces behind her. I felt that if I blinked I would lose track of her. Every half hour or so, when I found myself succumbing to the whims of my body by having to yawn or blink, I would discover she had moved a great distance in a short amount of time. Each time, I felt an urgent sense of panic, as if she were mine and losing her would cause me to lose a part of myself. In one of my panicked attempts to find her, I spotted her across the street, inside of a clothing store. I pressed my face against the glass and was frustrated by my own breath that permeated across the window and blocked my view for a moment. I tried to strain my eyes at the beautiful stranger inside the store—my breath on the window had blurred and distorted her very image. Quickly, I swiped at the window with my coat sleeve and was relieved to find her body still intact. When she came out of the store without having bought a single item, I told myself that I wouldn't lose her again.

The rational part of my brain was reduced to a single cell squeaking in frustration at this display. Nonetheless, my minuscule rational cell was loud enough to dampen some of the fantastical whims that I imagined carrying out. She was too beautiful to ever really notice me anyway, even her walk suggested that she had places to be and people that would miss her. I indulged both sides of myself by continuing to follow her and conceiving of different circumstances that would end in her eyes twinkling and her smile exuding the assurance of our bond.

She took an immediate turn down an alley, and like the child leashed to its mother, I turned as well as if on autopilot. I had been crafting a particularly interesting situation where she turns around and acknowledges me, tells me that she knew I was following her the entire time, and that she likes it, when I ran smack into the unattainable goddess herself. I immediately started stammering, coming up with various idiotic phrases all at once.

"I'm... S...sorry... I didn't...didn't see you,"

"I know you've been following me," she said it as if it were the one thing that she could count on as being true. Her words sliced through the air and cut through my clothing and skin, leaving me entirely exposed in the dark alleyway. My emotional nakedness was somehow comforted by the alleyway, as if its shade of black could reach out and wrap me in its darkness; surely this woman was about to turn me into the authorities, or worse, she might tear me down from root to tip by destroying my illusion of her. I had already begun

shrinking into myself, unable to even respond to the woman I had hundreds of imagined conversations with that night; the last remaining rational brain cell that I had left was beginning to burn away now that I had been caught.

Although it had felt like several lifetimes had occurred, it had really only been a single moment since she had confronted me. She shook her glossy blonde hair out, setting it free to roam the breezy air. She smiled, and advanced until we shared the same air. I was all at once overwhelmed by her intoxicating perfume, better than my imagination had crafted thus far. She thrust her face next to mine, her body moving fluidly and dream-like. Her voice came out in a hushed whisper: “It turns me on,” her voice kept me captivated with its delicate and elusive magic.